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POEMS

BY

GEORGE. H. KERSLEY

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A LITTLE BOOK

POEMS

BY

GEORGE HERBERT KERSLEY



LONDON
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—
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Laura.



B

ST. MARK'S, VENICE.

When first I saw St. Mark's, 'twas 'neath a mist
That hovered round its domes, concealing parts.
On ent'ring in, I felt beneath the sea,
In some large vaulted cave, made beautiful
With choicest gems by strange sea creatures found
And brought when they unto this temple came
To worship Oceanus long ago.
Anon, the visions of the misty past
Grew faint, and slowly melted into air,
Leaving my mind at liberty to scan
Unbiased by romantic fallacy.
Then, deep within my soul's great depth, I felt
A growing fervour which at length became
A speechless grand o'erpowering ecstasy:—
Such as one feels when Dawn replaces Night,
And all the birds sing welcome to the sun,
As he just peeps above the distant hills
And throws his rays to shake the dewy grass among.
A moment great in my soul's history

Was that, and like to few it lived before.
Somehow, the soul seems loath to stir itself,
So sleeps, or partly sleeps, this life away.
Great beauty tempts it from its slumbrous ease,
But only for a moment's wakefulness,
And then it swoons again—for—Oh ! how long ?
Perchance, for ever ! Doth it not appear
Our theories of a hell do point at this ?
And then again—O happy light of thought !
If we grant hell, we must grant heaven exists,
And granting heaven exists,—the soul must wake
To live in endless blissful ecstacies
Some day, it may be distant, still some day !



VENICE.

(A FRAGMENT).

Hush,—listen to the Adriatic waves,
They moan a requiem o'er their dying queen,
For Venice slowly pulse by pulse yields t'death !
Thus slowly dying, think not she has lost
The beauty Art and Nature gave when young,
For even now,—though weary, worn, and grey,
Majestic Venice gazes still on Time
With eyes so lovely, he holds back his hand
From ravage, and a moment weeps for her !





Gently Darling, very gently.



GENTLY DARLING, VERY GENTLY.

Gently darling, very gently,
Let thy dainty fingers trail
Through my massed and matted hair-locks
And above my forehead pale.
Stoop down slowly, kiss me, darling,
On my temples, for they burn,
Not with hatred, but with anguish
More intense than thou can'st learn.
More intense ? Ah, dearest, dearest !
God forbid thy gentle heart
Should ever 'mid its lovely lifetime
Feel of this a hundredth part !
Oh ! how awful is the raging
Of the tempest in my mind !
Like the flame-tongues of a furnace
Angered by the fanning wind.
Joys fly past, mere airy phantoms,
And dissolve when I would clasp !
But the sorrows are substantial,
And entrap with iron grasp !

I have sinned, and so have others,
Why alone should I be cursed
With this dreadful mental torture,
And this agonizing thirst ?
Slave I am to vain ambition,
And to hopes that come and go,
Built of images deceptive
To increase my load of woe.
Darling, gently, still more gently,
Let thy tap'ring fingers move ;
For thou can'st, if thou art willing,
Send through them to me thy love.
Ah, I feel it now, my sweet one !
Thou art soothing, thou art kind,
With thy fingers, soft as velvet,
Thou dost mesmerise my mind.
Into oblivion pain is melting,
And a longed-for peace comes o'er me :
Sleep will come, ah, yes, 'tis coming !
Thanks, O sweet one, thanks to thee !
Visions fade, my mind grows clearer.
Yet I'm weary and must sleep.
What, my darling, just fell on me ?
Was't a tear? and dost thou weep ?

Bend down dearest, bend thy hot face,
Press thy wet cheeks close on mine ;
Let me feel thy long deep breathing,
Let me take thy soul to mine.

Fear not, nerves will always quiver
When they're striving to control
This o'erpowering magic triumph
Over bondage of the soul.

Hush, be sacred, make no moaning,
Words are useless in this hour ;
Souls commune in unformed language,
Such as flower doth use to flower.

Now we've left our bodies, darling,
Shall we pressing onward go ?
Or sink back again to bodies,
Back to earth and earthly woe ?



LOVE'S CAUTION.

When your dreamy dark eyes were turned on me,
I felt overpowered with their charm,
And my love, that so long had been sleeping,
Awoke, and no more would be calm.
No dream-forms of most ravishing beauty
Have sunk to such depths in my soul
As that one fleeting glance that you gave me,
When joy for the moment was whole !
You felt, I am sure, that I loved you,
You knew that my heart was aflame,
You smiled as if sure of your triumph,
And thought not my ardour might tame.
I loved you ! I love you, my darling !
I care not who hears what I say.
My heart with your glancing was captured,
'Tis your's, my own darling, to-day !

Shall I search till I find you my darling,
And ask you to give me your heart ?

Or enjoy but a memory picture,
Which is but a sweet little part
Of a life that is mystic and charming,
So much as I know of it yet ?
If we meet, will you look on me kindly ?
Or fill my poor heart with regret ?
Perchance, you may spurn and pass by me,
Perchance, I may think you less sweet,
So darling, methinks 'twill be better
If never again we shall meet.
I loved you ! I love you, my darling !
I care not who hears what I say.
My heart with your glancing was captured,
'Tis your's, my own darling, to-day !





Strange Writing on a Shell.



STRANGE WRITING ON A SHELL.

The upper world was glad, for June had come,
And all the meadows had spring garments on,
Embroidered with the buds of summer flowers ;
When we, Janette and I, walked from the farm
Across the solemn, almost barren down
To where the healthy meadows overlooked the sea.
We little thought, as on we gaily walked,
We ne'er again should turn and homeward go !
Janette was very happy, and she sang,
As though she would out-sing the merry lark,
And ever and anon she stopped her song
That she might stoop to cull a dewy flower.
I too was happy, for having gained her love,
I knew full soon she would become my wife,
And through love's mighty magic her sweet soul
Would join with mine in endless unison.
When we had reached the meadows by the sea,
Janette, my sweet Janette, espied some flowers
Breeze-blown and nodding on the very verge
Of grass and mould o'erlapping concave cliff,

And ere I turned to chide, she tripped away
As fleetly as a fairy in a dream,
That she might claim the treasures as her own.
I called to her, but then it was too late !
Her foot already pressed upon slack ground,
And it sank under her to let her fall
Straight down, full forty feet, into the sea
That waiting champed its countless jaws for her !
Without an instant's thought, I gained the verge
And dived from thence into the mighty deep,
And clasped my loved one in my arms again !
Alas ! I could not find a landing place !
Janette was helpless, and her weight seemed more
Each awful moment that I held her head
Above the crests of frantic leaping waves,
Until I felt o'erpowered with its immensity.
“Janette ! Janette !” I cried, “cling, darling, cling !”
Then we sank down, locked in each other's arms,
And gently swooned into forgetfulness.

How long oblivion held my senses locked
I cannot say, nor have I known since then
How many days, and weeks, and years, have passed.
Be thou content to know that I awoke
And found myself into a merman changed.
My face and arms wore their old form and tint ;

But from the centre of my body down
To where my feet were wont to be, was changed
Into a scaly tail, with fan-like fins,
And colours playing o'er it numberless.
I gazed adown myself, and felt quite proud
Of all the novel beauty I had donned ;
Then waved my slender tail, and instantly
I found me through the water swiftly glide
To where a rock stood steadfast in the sea,
That was with gorgeous coral overgrown,
And there I paused, enthralled with loveliness.
The light came shining through the beryl sea,
And touched upon the scales of lazy fish
That, ever and anon, like phantoms, passed
Into the labyrinths of shady weeds
And all the flowers that grow within the sea.
The upper world has gardens fair and bright,
Has many a coppice, many a dingle sweet,
Has trees whose wealth of leaves the breezes wave,
And many sights that fill the soul with joy ;
But here we have all that is fair above
Made even fairer by this element
That never tires of adding beauty new
To what seemed peerless beauty heretofore,
And stealing grandeur from the world above
To mingle with its mysteries below.

Here colours of the pearl, and amethyst,
The ruby, emerald, and beryl stone,
In lovely masses float and interfloat :
Each combination is so excellent,
The seeing soul in awful homage bows
And prays with fervour unto Beauty's God.

As soon as primal wonderment had passed,
I thought of my Janette ! Where could she be ?
Then beauty lost for me its potent charms,
And solitude weighed on me like a curse.
“Janette” I cried, and cried, and cried again,
With voice so loud and sad,—that one above,
Walking in meditation by the sea,
Would sure have heard, and thought within himself,
“E'en neath the laughing ripples sadness dwells.”
From when the eastern mists first caught the glow
Cast from the golden body of the sun,
Till when the western clouds were rosy hued,
I sought, but could not find, my lost Janette,
And when the moon shone o'er the sleepy sea
I sought again for many a weary hour.
Thus day by day, and night by night, I sought :
Until one night, aweary of my search,
I lay, half sleeping, on a mossy rock,

And heard, in cadence like a tidal sigh,
A gentle voice that cried,—ah ! cried for me !

“Janette !” with wild ecstatic joy, I cried,
And through the water darted to my love.
She too had changed, and donned mermaid’s form.
Her hair reflected back the moonbeam’s sheen
From all its wand’ring ripples, and, methought,
The silvern ripples of the wind-swept sea
Grew jealous, for they quickly sprang to waves.
What mattered it to us, e’en if the waves
Had grown with anger unto mountains’ height ?
We were again together—hand in hand !
We ne’er have parted since that joyous day.
And even now, while I lean down to scratch
These words upon this shell, she holds one hand !
If any friend of yore looks on this shell and reads,
Let him forget his mourning for our loss,
And be right glad, for we are happy here !



TO ONE IN ITALY.

“T’amo, amo, amo !” Yes !
I know, dear girl, thy love:
And yet it comes as naught to me,
My heart it cannot move !

There was a time my heart lay bare,
But then came frost,—not sun !
And now no kindness can undo
The lasting harm that’s done.

I hate myself that I am thus;
I grieve to see thy pain;
But love can never master self
And make me slave again !

I have grown free,—if freedom this !
And yet how sweet ’twould be
To feel myself once more controlled,
Controlled, dear girl, by thee !

As in an ash, burnt-out, and black,
Some warmth awhile remains,
To tell of heat and glow it's owned,
But nevermore regains.

Ah me ! so in my burnt-out heart
A warmth is ling'ring still;
But nevermore can glow return
To please e'en thy sweet will !

Thy fanning is quite useless dear,
The fire will not revive;
Thou only dost prolong my strife,
And keep regret alive.

Crush, yes, rather crush my heart,
That it may quickly die,
For there will be no looking back
When it doth lifeless lie.





The Buried Soul.



THE BURIED SOUL.

When but a boy, I had a comely form,
Well knit, with all proportions good,
A bright fresh face, with features fully round,
And lovely women smiled upon me then.
Before I grew to manhood's dignity,
I felt an ardent love for poetry
Which led me from the ways of common men,
And bade me upward glance to higher things.
My soul within me grew,—to such extent
That often it appeared unruled by me,—
An independent force of excellence
That drove inferiority away !
Sometimes it like a burden weighed me down,
And made me feel aweary of my life.
All comeliness of form soon passed from me,
My features lost their grace, my limbs their strength,
And lovely women ceased to smile on me.
For many a day, I took no note of how
My old attractions left me, nor of how

I failed to please the taste of womankind.
Because my soul gave me intense delight.

Somehow, one day I paused, I know not why,
(A touch of human weakness, I suppose),
And turned to see myself as I was seen
By those I left behind me in my youth.
How changed ! How nude of outward grace !
I turned unto a woman, and implored
That she would show some tenderness to me ;
But she a moment glanced upon my form,
Then passed away, without a cheering word.
“O fool !” I said, “O fool, what have you done ?”
Without a moment’s pause, I made resolve
That I would live as soulless as my friends.
My body had been weakened by my soul,
So I was forced to tend it carefully,
And give it all the sweetest nourishment,
That it might don its old attractiveness.

Now I have gained my wish,—Fate smiles on me !
I am more comely than most men around ;
I am indeed the women’s favourite ;
No burden makes me weary of my life ;

A sweet contentment ever dwells with me ;
My life is rounded into harmony.
But stay ! I sleep ! I dream ! O soul awake !
O soul, give me a moment's ecstacy !
Too late ! My body over-ruled my soul !
Too late ! My soul is buried for this life !



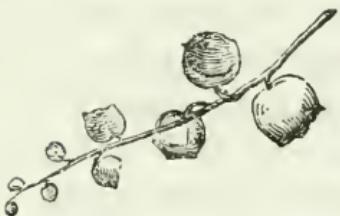
TO SARA.

The boats are sailing in the bay,
And folk crowd in the town,
But I am walking all alone
Upon a sun-lit down.

The grass is deep beneath my feet
And fragrant with its flowers ;
But, Oh ! my soul is far from here
Controlled by unknown powers.

There was a time I could have felt
Contented with this scene,
But then my mind was less intense,
My spirit more serene.
The clear blue sky melts into mist,
The mist melts into sea ;
O come ! my kindred spirit come,
That I may melt in thee !

O Sara dear ! when thou wast near
My soul was not away ;
But then I did not know thy worth,
I know it dear to-day !
Whate'er the powers that grasp my soul,
I'm sure it would get free
If thou wer't here, my Sara dear,
That it might melt in thee.



SERENADE.

O list, divinest love ! to thee I sing.
My heart aches, 'though the night is calm and sweet,
And gentle is the south wind's whispering ;
The silent dew has drowned the late sun's heat,
 And glist'ning stars shine forth.
 And glist'ning stars shine forth !

O list, divinest love ! to thee I sing.
Love burns my heart and keeps my soul from rest ;
Love strikes the chord and makes these accents ring ;
Love caused a prayer to grow within my breast
 For thee, dear heart, alone.
 For thee, dear heart, alone !

O list, divinest love ! to thee I sing.
My words convey small weight of what I feel,
Or even thou, proud one, would'st cease to sting,
And kindly turn with loving words to heal
 The soul I gave to thee.
 The soul I gave to thee !

TO TORU DUTT.

Sweet sister, Toru Dutt, why dids't thou die ?
The world has need of thee ;—it feels its loss
Now that thy works thy value testify,
Now that it knows how high above its dross
Thy noble spirit soared to catch a gleam
Of that grand light in which great poets live,
To catch a gleam, and then to freely give
The world, from off thy radiant form, a beam.

Thy voice, could it not as Savitri's voice
Force Death to pity, and at length to yield
The captive spirit which had formed his choice ?
Methinks thou dids't not pray,—for what heart's shield
Was thick or strong enough to stand unrent
The piercing sweetness of thy melodies,
That to such giddy height of grandeur rise
They overpower the soul with wonderment ?

Thy throat, was it with constant singing dry ?
Were thy lips parched with heat of alien song ?

Had reading blurred the brightness of thine eye,
 And made thee for refreshing slumber long ?
 Or why, when from dim regions of the dead
 A spectral hand held out a cup, did'st thou
 Unto its verge in trusting silence bow,
 And drink deep of the blood from poppies bled ?

How gladly would we call thee back again,
 Sweet sister, to this vagrant life of ours !
 Forgetting in our selfishness, its pain [flowers.
 Would once more wound thy soul, as frost wounds
 No longer will I question, 'tis not kind
 To call thy wandering spirit nearer me,
 That I may learn some priceless truths from thee,
 Or gain a lasting solace for my mind.

Farewell,—O soul most beautiful !
 Farewell ! May peace dwell with thee evermore !
 May some sweet anodyne thy senses lull
 While thou art wafting to the farther shore
 Over the mystic waves of Lethe's stream !
 If death is dreamless sleep,—then sweet thy sleep !
 If death is sleep, but not quite dreamless deep,
 May everlasting gladness be thy dream !



To Mary.



TO MARY.

Another London season had gone by,
And I had tasted all its many sweets,
But found no fount of true felicity
Where Wealth scorned Poverty in crowded streets.
So Mary, to your native hills I came,
In ignorance of you, to paint their forms
In sunshine bathed, or dark amidst great storms,
And seek foundation for my future fame.

Anon we met, O Mary—you and I !
Our friends would say it was by accident ;
But no, their light of thought I will deny,
Nothing is chance, but all divinely meant.
Think not that when two clouds together run
And make the thunder roar, the light'ning play,
They have in trackless ether lost their way,
And thus together meet for Chance's fun.

Ah ! Mary dear, we need not mind the cause,
It is enough for us that we have met !
My heart, dear girl, is yours, and shall not pause
From loving you, until my eyes forget

The fairest form they ever looked upon,
My ears,—the soothing music of your voice,
My will,—its weakness and sweet loss of choice
When first your loveliness before me shone.

The clouds float o'er the hills ; but, Mary, still
My heart has little wish to follow them
While you are near, and without effort fill
My soul with that devotion none condemn :
I seek for beauty—you are beautiful !
What need for me to paint the clouds and hills,
(The charm of which your radiant aspect kills),
When I am with your beauty's worship full ?

Come, Mary, be my model, and inspire
My soul to show to men your loveliness,
That they may feel within their souls a fire
For ever driving them to wild distress,
Because they seek, and cannot ever find
Another creature with the charms you own !
Come, Mary, let us make them vainly groan,
'Twould bring us fame by being thus unkind.

My sluggish hand will not obey my soul,
It misses all your points of loveliness ;
And I can never, never gain the goal
For which I strive, and strive without success.

It was mere vanity, O Mary dear,
For me to think I could possess the power
To give my fellow men so rich a dower !
Yet I cannot be sad, for you are near !

Gaze in my eyes, and darling, let me feel,
In spite of what the world 'gainst me will say,
Your splendid sympathy will always heal
My wounded heart, and take my spleen away.
Come, Mary, lean your head back, let us kiss !
Ay, darling, throw your arms around my neck
And draw me nearer to you ! Do not check
Your soul from meeting mine in mad'ning bliss !

Where are the hills and clouds, O Mary, now !
I have no sketch of them to take to town !
My work will not win laurels for my brow !
My wretched sketch of you can't gain renown !
Then has my time been wasted—vainly spent ?
No, no ! for darling Mary we have met !
And never in this world can we forget
The great deep joy this time to us has lent.



To the Ocean.



TO THE OCEAN.

Man hath the power to mar the land
And take its soothing charms away,
But Ocean, never can his hand
Impede thy sway.

Ah, thou art bold, and strong, and free :
As thou art god-like when thy throes
Of ire proclaim divinity,
So in repose.

Thou art a refuge to the mind,
A comfort to the weary heart ;
And in thy breast the soul can find
Its counterpart.

I long have lived with other men
And felt the falseness of their ways,
Their little circles, little ken,
And wasted days.

I have drunk deep of love, most sweet
Was that large draught of anodyne,
But not for long could it defeat
These pains of mine :—

My soul is longing to expand,
With sunny light and sweetness full,
That it may better understand
The Beautiful :

But, Oh ! it is so much weighed down
By ignorance and littleness,
By faults of others, faults my own,
And feebleness.

And now unto thy bourne I near,
Foot-sore with pilgrimage and faint,
O mighty Ocean ! deign to hear
My sad complaint.

Receive me to thy inmost heart,
Teach me thy language and desires
O make me of thyself a part !
As other sires.

O give me of thy boundless health,
Magnificent impressiveness,
Titanic vigour, splendid wealth
Of earnestness.

And of thy freedom most of all.
Yes, make me free ! Yes, make me free !
And then the light of heaven will fall
On thee and me.





Sink in Thysel.



SINK IN THYSELF.

“Sink in thyself.” Ah me !
Would that I could !
Would that I could,
And quite forget the world !
Whose voice falls jarring on my ears,
And whose uncertain mighty heart
Beats not in easy harmony with mine,
But makes discordant music fraught with pain.

If I should sink within myself,
I should find naught but mutiny !
Wars deadlier, more oppressive far,
Than those whose rage I hear without ;
Wars that can bring no peace ;
Wars that can see no end ;
Wars lacking purpose, hopeless, dark,
That know no valour, mercy, love !
If I could sink, as through old Ocean’s depth
Down, down beyond the wave-vexed surface, down

To where true peace and aweless silence dwell !
But it is not so. Self quickly tires of self
And grows a torment, raging, horrible.
Where is the anodyne to soothe ? and where
The home of refuge with its open doors ?

If I should sink me in the world
And try to grow content to be
Only an undivided part
Of one great universal whole,
How then ?
Should I lose aught ?
Would't be a gain to earth ?
Would it bring harmony ?
Should I be glad ?
How then ?

The water nearest to the fount
Glides clearest, for unmarred it springs
From out the bosom of the earth,
And finds no taint until it runs
Far from its source through winding ways
Toward the great all-cleansing sea.
Life's source,—how fresh, glad, bright, and beautiful !

Life's flowing stream—how marred, dull, sad, and grim !
And yet, how lovely is the sea called Death !
In whose lush bosom evils swoon and sink,
And on whose gladsome waves perfection floats !

The course of life seems darker now
Than ere before.
Men thinking to bring light on earth,
Have darkness brought.
The human body now is naught,
And naught the soul.
Man yields his dignity unto
Machinery !

Could I not gain a sympathy
With man and all his ways and works,
Not overlooking frailty,
But ever seeking its excuse ?
Almighty God ! lean down and list,
I beg a weighty boon of Thee.
Turn not away, although,—my sins
Grim barriers stand 'twixt Thee and me,
And I have wand'ring lost my way,
And seeking light found only night,

Bow down, great God, and hear my prayer !
The peaceful nights,
The sunny days,
The placid lakes,
The angry seas,
The flowers that deck the fields,
The leaves that clothe the trees,
The mists that sail away
Into the depth of skies,
And works of art; yes, all loved things,
Save only transitory man,
Have failed to grasp and make me theirs.
So only man remains
My comforter to be,
And in him let me sink
O God ! myself and mine.

Give me far-reaching godly sympathy,
Unbiased, open, and magnificent,
Such as the mighty god-man Shakespeare had !
Then I might more contented grow, and live
In sweet accordance with thy primal plan.

Full many a soul finds comfort in belief
The human stream first flowed, O God ! from Thee ;

And surely that same stream that brought us hence
Will lead us back into thy breast again !
So let me sink into humanity,
And be drawn on by that stupendous stream
Through all life's dreaded ills, no matter what,
So that I gain the truth and light at last !



SONNET.

MISJUDGED.

O God ! is it for endless time to be ?
I pray Thee, intervene ! Let others know
Why this and that in me are always so,
And thus they were ordained for use by Thee.
'Tis sad, my soul is not a moment free
To rise from out the ceaseless ebb and flow
Of that unfathomed boundless sea of woe
Made by the frailty of Humanity !

If by the crowd I must be still unknown,
Grant it, dear Lord, I find a kindred soul
Wearing a woman's form, and that my whole
Existence may without reserve be shown
To this one soul, whose strength ere now has grown
Enough to calm my journey to death's goal.

SONNET.

LIFE WITHOUT LOVE.

How is it Love that thou hast let me rest
So many weeks, so many months and years ?
My heart is sick of self and selfish fears.
Ah, like the light that lives along the west
After the sun has fallen 'neath Ocean's breast
Is seen by one in sadness through his tears,
So now to me in vision reappears
The time when I with light of love was blest.

Without love's fervour mortal life is vain,
The murmur of the sea is moan indeed,
E'en summer sunlight seems to have a stain,
And flowers may fade uncultured upon the mead.
O Love, behold the heart that now doth bleed
And fill it with thine ecstasy again !

SONNET.

A DREAM OF LOVE.

Last night I dreamed I was in love again !
And she I loved was young and very fair ;
Her eyes gleamed midst the shadow of her hair,
Like flowers gleam in twilight after rain.
Her beauty stole the reason from my brain,
And in the happy way that swallows pair,
We joined in love together, while the air
Grew lighter, all nature sang, and naught seemed vain.

This morn I woke, and knew 'twas all a dream,
But felt a gladness thrilling in my heart
Nigh great as when those phantom eyes did gleam.
Ah, Cupid, has't thou thrown a fiery dart ?
Reward for weary vigils, is this part ?
If so, throw on, make life all gladness seem !

SONNET.

YOUTH'S VANITY.

When I was younger and possessed more hope,
I knew not how to prize thy love and thee,
But threw thee as a worthless thing from me,
And left thy love with other wills to cope.
Methought good stars met in my horoscope,
And naught that I should do would ever be
Among the things that fail ; and always free,
I'd run towards my goal,—but never grope.

Ah me ! I'm older and less hopeful now !
My part in life is harder than I thought,
And what I hoped to break has made me bow.
Dear one, an awful truth flown years have taught :—
The crown of life is love, all else is naught ;
Joy only lives in love's resplendent glow.



In a Restaurant.



IN A RESTAURANT.

The room was starred with fairy lights,
And gay with people richly drest ;
Just such a place as aye delights
The townsman when he takes his rest !

The stench of vegetation cooked !
The odour of hot steaming meat,
And other things that had been booked
For hungry Londoners to eat,

Rose on the air, and had a fight
To overpower the reeking scents
That from clean handkerchiefs made flight.
That battle caused no banishments !

I am not dainty, but I feel
Sometimes a want of appetite
In place like this, things don't appeal
With much enticement to my sight.

A woman sat just opposite
To me, some twenty feet away.
She seemed to have no appetite !
And simply with her food did play.

A man sat by her. Who was he ?
Ah ! soon I learned no need to dread
His anger if she looked at me ;—
He was her husband, and he read.

At length, she gazed across at me !
Our eyes met, and I saw her soul !
A beautiful infinity !
Within itself, life's end and goal.

She tried to look away, but no !
I held her captive with my eyes.
Soul piercing into soul, to know
All secrets and all mysteries !

I tried to look away, but no !
She held me captive with her eyes.
Soul piercing into soul, to know
All secrets and all mysteries !

Aware of nothing but her eyes,
Those lovely soul-gates op'ning wide !
I sat, and gazed in ecstacies.
My soul claimed her's to be its bride.

How little did the husband know
The truth of things as then they stood !
He started up, and moved to go ;
She followed, yes, yes,—very good !

She followed, but could not undo
What fate had done. Her soul is mine !
The case is hard, but see it through
I must ! If death,—I'll pay the fine.



APART.

We are apart to-day !
Yet all between is nought,
We pierce it through with thought
That drives the clouds away.

I see you darling mine !
As if no space between
Made vain attempt to screen
A being so divine.

Lean forward, whisper dear !
The music of your voice
Will leave the air no choice,
But to enchant my ear.

O whisper once again !
Material is dead,
I live in what you said.
O whisper once again !

A TWINGE OF CONSCIENCE.

This morning my memory took me
Back to a year ago,
My lips were repeating the verses
That from your lips did flow.

Those lovely Italian verses
Learned from your lips, my dear !
When we were living as lovers,
Happy and staunch, last year !

I ask not forgiveness for leaving
You with your fears alone:
Pray, treat me with scorn, I deserve it;
All was my fault, I own.

I left you because of your loving
Seeming a weight on me,—
A weight, and a check, and a shadow !
Left, that I might be free !

Ah, selfishness reigned at that moment !
Reigned ? In the past, not now ?
Yea truly, it reigned, and is reigning,
Still at its throne I bow.

You wonder, I'm sure, at my writing
Thus, in so harsh a tone ;
It is, through my conscience enforcing
Me a fresh twinge to own :—

You taught me your language, believing
Love would reward your pains ;
But now I have learned the language,
You will receive no gains.

I feel like a thief who possesses
Goods he would fain return.
Most gladly I'll forfeit my plunder,
And what you taught—unlearn.



Folly.



FOLLY.

Leave kissing, clinging, and this strife.
No more ! I say, no more !
Too long has folly shaped my life,
But now the dream is o'er.

Yes, thou art beautiful indeed !
But turn thy face away,
Teach other hearts thine easy creed,
I'm weary of this play.

Turn not, turn not, those eyes to me !
Their force shall not again
Entice my free-grown heart to thee,
Nor steal away my brain.

Reserve thy sighs for other ears !
Think not again of me,
O darling ! but forget thy tears
And infelicity.

Think not that I have never loved,
Think not that I am cold ;
I only wish to be removed
From what I was of old.

Parched lips, hot eyes, and burning heart ;
Impassioned golden dreams,
And feelings of becoming part
Of living's strange extremes:

These are first signs of love, methinks,
(And I have known them all !)
Then in love's depth the spirit sinks
Almost beyond recall.

Almost beyond recall ? Ah me !
It seemeth so at first !
But soon complete satiety
Is found by lover's thirst.

Then up the spirit comes again !
Grown colder from its dip,
And feeling love a little vain,
But still inclined to slip.

Farewell ! I've done with folly now !
I've wasted priceless years,
For which with heartfelt shame I bow,
And shed remorseful tears.

My energy has not quite gone,
Some life may yet remain ;
So now I'll labour to atone
And self respect regain.





The Tale of Sir George.



1800-1801

1800-1801

THE TALE OF SIR GEORGE.

The Lady Florence was a high-born maid,
Whose wealth, though great, was to her beauty naught,
For nature had excelled itself in her.
She was most slight, and fair, and delicate,
A flower forsooth, of Flora's garden queen.
Her eyes were soft grey-blue, and shadowed deep
Beneath their gold-fringed alabaster lids;
Magnetic orbs of mystery they were,
And yet so kind and full of sympathy,
No one could still unloving look on them.
Her carmine lips, made fragrant by her breath,
Seemed conscious of their own great loveliness,
And pouted beautiful reproof to lips
That craved the ecstacy of their impress.
Her small lithe hand was like a fairy's wand
That could by gently waving conjure up
Enchantment and a world of ravishment.
No wonder then, that lovers numberless
Came from all lands to bow them at her feet!

But still, her favour seemed in balance held
By two brave knights,—Sir Howard and Sir George.

Sir Howard was a noble gentleman,
Handsome, and full of courtly dignity:
Sir George, no less a noble gentleman,
Had strength of intellect which made his form
Too frail to own Sir Howard's dignity.

One day it chanced the rival lovers met
Within the dark seclusion of a wood;
And some small circumstance,—a little slip
Not quite observant of true courtesy,—
Gave them the cue, then all their pent-up rage,
And jealousy, and hate, and discontent,
Found utterance in that dread snake-like hiss
Of steel swift passing over rival steel!
They fought with bitterness of purpose long
And equally, until Sir George made pass
Beyond Sir Howard's guard into his heart.

Sir George a moment gazed upon his foe,
Then turned and wandered slowly through the wood.
The horrible event weighed on his mind

And made him curse his fate, for he could see
No gain nor triumph in his victory;
His rival now was dead, but in himself
Had grown a cause his goddess to estrange !
Abject, forlorn, and sorrowful, he moved,
And though his eyes were fixed in awful stare,
He nothing saw, he knew not where he went.
Poor wand'ring, tortured, blood-enshrouded soul !

Three days Sir George thus wandered mournfully,
Avoiding intercourse and sight of men;
And thus upon the fourth he wandered, till
The slow sad tolling of a distant bell
Proclaimed to him Sir Howard's funeral.
He paused, and thought, then walked toward the place
From whence the breeze the bell's strong voice conveyed.

Quite unobserved, Sir George drew near to where
The crowd had gathered round Sir Howard's corse;
And soon he spied the Lady Florence stand,
A little space removed, nigh mad with grief,
Gazing toward the flower-strewn Howard's corse.
Grief made her lovelier, as there she stood,
With tears fast flowing down her beauteous cheek,

And sighs upheaving her angelic breast.
He knew, for one swift glance had told him so,
She loved him not ! and he had killed the one
She loved, and filled her with despair.
No envy now was in his manly breast,
He loved her more than he had loved ere now,
He pitied her, he pitied her, and tears
Flowed quickly down his quiv'ring cheek,
While all his manhood yielded unto grief.

The service had dragged on as far as where
The sexton took into his hand some earth
To sprinkle on the dead, when suddenly, [there"]!
Sir George broke through the crowd and cried,—“Stop
The people would had laid rough hands on him,
But something mystic in him forced them back.
Then silent at the grave's foot knelt he down,
And stretched his arms towards the corse, and looked
With eager wild intensity down, down,
Down through the flowers into the dead man's eyes!
Each nerve in him was nigh to bursting strung!
His limbs with wonderful excitement shook!
His face turned deathly pale! His lips turned black!
Cold sweat fell quickly from his straightened hair!

But still his eyes with piercing brightness shone!
Then came a change. His nerves with weakness throbbed,
His weakened limbs just shook, as old men's shake,
His teeth began to chatter, and his breath
Came lab'ring up his hard and rattling throat!
The flowers upon the corse 'gan shake, and fall
Toward the edges of the grave, and then!
The form they had enshrouded slightly moved!
And then the life came swiftly back again!
And then Sir Howard op'ed his wond'ring eyes!
To see a lovely smile upon Sir George's face,
That lingered there a moment ere he died.



SONNET.

EVENING.

The saffron moon floats on a violet deep,
Low down along the west a crimson ray
Thrills with the pulses of a dying day,
While from the valley, up the neighb'ring steep,
The silent opal vapours gently creep,
The fishing-boats rock lanterns in the bay,
And in the harbour red lights poise and sway
Like poppies beck'ning to the land of sleep.

A strange sad silence ling'ringly
Alights upon the over-conscious ear,
Then steals away again, most cautiously,
Like some poor guilty thing in flight from fear,
When from the vale a murmur travels here,
Or sighs make known that sleepless is the sea.

FINIS.



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